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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000351

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMESE ARMY PREPARES TO THROW A PARTY - FOR ITSELF

REF: A. 04 RANGOON 404

[1](#)B. 03 RANGOON 398

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Burmese regime is undertaking extensive preparations to commemorate the country's 60th Armed Forces Day (March 27), in more grandiose fashion than ever, with a traditional military parade and associated events, to which the general public is denied any access. This year, in a sign of the regime's growing disregard for international opinion, the SPDC has not invited the diplomatic corps to participate. The season would not be complete without mysterious bombing incidents and, true to form, several small devices detonated or were "discovered" in Rangoon between March 16-19, giving the regime a well-timed opportunity to rant against exiled "terrorists" and further make the case for SPDC control of the government. For a population that faces daily reminders that the military rules the roost, Armed Forces Day is simply an opportunity for the regime to rub in the reality that the generals are here to stay. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The SPDC military regime is pulling out all the stops in preparation for its most significant holiday of the year, Armed Forces Day, which is observed on March 27. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the holiday, originally established to commemorate independence hero Aung San's (father of Aung San Suu Kyi) decision in 1945 to throw Burmese Army support behind international forces allied against the Japanese occupation. However, the SPDC de-emphasizes the historical origins of the holiday and instead treats the occasion as an annual opportunity to glorify the exploits of the Armed Forces ("Tatmadaw") and to underscore the regime's view that military rule is a necessity.

Those Pesky Subterranean Destructive Elements

[1](#)3. (U) The regime's propaganda machinery has been in full gear since the beginning of the year, extolling the virtues of the Tatmadaw and laying the groundwork for a major military celebration on March 27. State-run newspapers and television stations are documenting on a daily basis how the Tatmadaw, primarily through the construction of bridges and dams, has over the past 17 years pulled Burma out from the dark ages and saved the country from disintegration. "In the absence of the Tatmadaw, the country would be like a fish in little water," read one recent headline, following by a poem that declared the Tatmadaw "is crushing all who fall in the category of enemies above land and under, also under the water."

[1](#)4. (U) SPDC member, and chief of military training, Lt Gen Kyaw Win is spearheading preparations for the regime's "special" observance of the 60th anniversary of the holiday, which will include an enormous military parade and an official state dinner. Among many preparations, the regime has for weeks mobilized thousands of troops for regular parade drilling, erected Christmas-style lighting throughout central Rangoon, held various exhibitions and contests, and conducted a typical regime fundraising campaign in which businesses and wealthy individuals are hit up for cash and in-kind contributions. A recent tally of donations published in the regime's mouthpiece, The New Light of Myanmar, included seven million kyat in cash (roughly US \$8,000), 5,000 cans of sardines, 3,000 postcards, 35 packets of biscuits, and 20 bags of rice.

"For the People" (Who Stay at Home)

[1](#)5. (U) The regime's primary focus on Armed Forces Day is a massive military parade that takes place at Resistance Park, a 20-acre parade ground inside People's Park in central Rangoon. Ringing the parade ground are brightly painted billboards that declare "Tatmadaw for the People." However, Resistance Park is closed year-round to the public and the regime takes every possible measure to ensure that "the people" do not partake in Armed Forces Day events. Upwards of ten thousand rank and file soldiers will parade before the SPDC generals, while authorities close off all streets in the vicinity of the park; there are no spectators and the only

invited guests are members of the defense attache corps.

16. (SBU) This year, in a sign of the regime's growing disregard for international opinion, the SPDC has not invited the diplomatic corps to the official state dinner on the evening of Armed Forces Day (in past years, in any case, EU Ambassadors planned foreign travel to avoid attending the dinner and the U.S. Chief of Mission stayed in Rangoon, but declined to attend). Instead, several hundred senior members of the military, government, and mass-member Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) are expected to gather and fete the accomplishments of the Tatmadaw, capping a day of partying held by, and for, the armed forces. The National League for Democracy--without the participation of many leaders, members, and supporters who remain in detention--will host a considerably more modest commemoration for the political opposition, which refers to the holiday as "Resistance Day" (Emboffs plan to attend). Celebrating with a Bang

17. (SBU) In recent years (ref B), during the weeks leading up to, and including, Armed Forces Day, a traditional component of the holiday has been mysterious bombings and other incidents involving unexplained explosive devices. This year has been no exception. On March 16, authorities "discovered" an unexploded device at a bus station in eastern Rangoon and, on the following day, a small device detonated and damaged a bus at the same station. During the early morning hours of March 19, a similar device exploded in the bathroom of a guest room at a two-star hotel in downtown Rangoon, causing limited damage. None of these incidents has resulted in casualties.

18. (C) In standard fashion, the regime has rounded up and interrogated individuals in the vicinity of these bombings and blamed anti-regime "terrorists," such as the exiled (and outlawed) Thailand-based "National League for Democracy, Liberated Areas" (NLD-LA) and the "All Burma Students' Democratic Front" (ABSDF). However, as in the wake of previous incidents, authorities have offered no compelling evidence or made transparent their alleged investigations, leaving most locals to conclude that members or supporters of the government planted the explosive devices as a pretext to crack down further on the democratic opposition.

Comment: Here's Mud in Your Face

19. (C) The omnipresent (and, some would say, omnipotent) Burmese military regime controls most aspects of average citizens' lives. Harassment, intimidation, arrogance, and self-enrichment are daily reminders that the armed forces, and not the general population, rule the roost. A recent regime "clarification" at the ongoing National Convention (the Parliament will have the power to make laws "if/if the executive authority is subject to the provisions of the Constitution") gave further evidence that the generals, who continue to believe that "the people" are incapable of governing, plan to perpetuate military rule. Armed Forces Day is simply an opportunity for the regime to rub that reality in the faces of ordinary Burmese. End Comment.
Martinez